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Dr. RYMER'S

Commencement-SERMON.

Dr. R. M. E. R. S.

Continued from 2nd page.

*The Wisdom of the Tenth Command-
ment; with some Practical Obser-
vations to promote Obedience to it.*

A
S E R M O N

PREACH'D at

St. MARY'S CHURCH

In CAMBRIDGE,

On the Third Day of *July*, 1726.

Being COMMENCEMENT-SUNDAY.

By *R.* THO. RYMER, D. D. late Fellow of
Queen's-College in that University, and Chap-
lain to the Right Reverend Father in GOD,
THOMAS, Lord Bishop of *Ely*.

L O N D O N:

Printed for J. WALTHOE, over-against the
Royal-Exchange in *Cornhill*. 1726.

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S E R M O N

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I N

C A M B R I D G E.

Exod. xx. 17.

Thou shalt not covet.

THESE words are the substance of the tenth commandment.

The use I intend to make of 'em, is this ;

First, To shew the wisdom of this commandment, with respect to its influence on the rest.

Secondly,

Secondly, To propose some practical observations, proper to promote obedience to it.

All the former commandments regard men's external behaviour, either to their God, or to each other : This proposes to regulate the affections of the mind, and by such regulation, to protect the duties contain'd in the other nine commandments ; those duties will always be in danger, while the heart's under the influence of irregular desires ; an extravagant uneasiness, for any thing which we have no lawful means of obtaining, is a probable introduction to a contempt of all the commandments ; those which relate to God, as well as those which concern our neighbour ; no man can be assur'd of stopping where he pleases ; when he has given way to a vicious passion, it will not be controul'd at discretion.

This vice therefore is by all means to be suppress'd ; 'tis an obstinate enemy to God's authority : this will appear from a short survey of these commandments.

As to the first and second, the subjects of which are the worship of the only true God, and the worshipping of him in a manner worthy of his nature, we may observe, when *Solomon* prostituted his affections to strange women, forbid by God, of the nations concerning which the
 Lord

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Lord said unto Israel; ye shall not go in unto them, neither shall they come in unto you; for surely they will turn away your heart after their gods: The wisdom of that law was soon justified; *Solomon* soon multiplied gods, and was guilty of *gross idolatry*, and had any thing of greater moment stood in the way of his unlawful desires, it had surely fallen before them.

The third commandment enjoins due reverence to God's name; but we find *Job's* distress was thought capable of taking that impious advice, *curse God and die*: and *Agur* is earnest in his prayer against poverty, lest he should be tempted *to take the name of his God in vain*; and coveting in any circumstances is the worst kind of poverty, the most likely to prophane or blaspheme.

The fourth commandment appropriates a certain proportion of our time to God's worship; but the same irregular temper will represent that time lost which is spent in God's service, whether in publick or in private; his *sabbaths* will be burdens to such minds, and will be spent accordingly.

Thus 'tis certain that coveting in general is an enemy to those commandments that relate to God; but it seems more particularly to be forbid, with a view to those that concern

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cern men's behaviour to each other ; every one of which must probably fall a victim to whatever they make their idol.

The fifth commandment urges the duties of children to their parents ; but all the obligations of nature, and all the endearments of education quite lose their force, when this vice has got possession of the heart. Whatever degree of substance parents may be possess'd of, they are considered by such children as keeping so much from them ; the continuance of their life is considered as deferring their hopes ; and they are look'd on by degrees, as keeping possession longer than they should do, and thereby injuring their heirs ; while they are look'd on with such eyes, while they are consider'd in such a light, what honour can be paid them ? what duty, what affection can be preserv'd for them ? And where this vice is not carry'd so far, it may in a great measure alienate the mind, it may cool the affections, and destroy that reverence that is insisted on in that commandment, under the name of honour.

Where extravagance, or imprudence attends it, and makes unreasonable demands, which may be frequently expected, the neglect and contempt of parents, will probably be the consequence of them, whether gratified or rejected :

if

if gratified, they carry the heart away into several vicious views, and these make the authority and concern of parents great grievances; if rejected, they are so many discontents, so many accusations and complaints against them, continually corrupting the heart, and engaging it in disaffection and disesteem, withdrawing all the duty, that may safely be withdrawn, and tainting what remains with ill humour; and 'tis very plain such a spirit must have an aversion to that part of the duty of this commandment, which consists in assisting parents when providence shall make it necessary; and where there is such an aversion, excuses will never be wanting, tho' Corban can't be pleaded; something will always be found out, to countenance such undutiful resolutions.

And as to all the other commandments, this temper of coveting immediately loosens the obligations: The very first thought is, wishing we might break them, and the next is contriving means to do it; every day's observation confirms this truth, that where-ever this temper takes place, all the commandments are in great danger.

This was soon too hard for the piety of *David*; it soon reconcil'd him to adultery; nor would it suffer him to stop there, it soon made him resolve upon murder too. Thus again,

in the case of *Naboth*, false witness and murder were its immediate consequence; the admir'd vineyard must be had, whatever means procur'd it; and if this temper can prevail so far, the eighth commandment, will never be able to withstand it; if it will proceed resolutely in the publick view of the world, there's no hopes of its scrupling such dishonesty, as may be suppos'd private.

God therefore, as the searcher of hearts, has wisely laid this restraint upon our thoughts; *out of the heart*, says our Saviour, *proceed evil thoughts*, (the seeds of all sorts of wickedness) *murthers, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies*, Mat. xv. 19. Christ had probably these commandments in view, when he spake these words; and he represents the heart as the fountain head, from which all these bitter streams flow, which so often drown men in destruction and perdition.

If we would therefore secure a regular obedience to those commandments, we must carefully watch our inclinations. 'Tis not sufficient, that we have not yet been guilty of any outward violations of any one of these laws; if we suffer evil thoughts to gather in our hearts, they will probably soon break out into a storm upon them all.

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The second thing I propos'd was, to lay down some practical observations to promote obedience to this commandment, and thereby secure the rest.

The first step to any regular obedience is, to consider impartially what we are; what our character in life is; and how we are provided to support it.

If Men will allow their passions to kindle a fire in their breasts, without considering what may be reasonably expected in their character, and what not, the flames may probably break out upon their neighbours, but they must suffer most by 'em themselves, 'tis harrassing their souls upon false suppositions; they first mistake themselves, and then every thing about them: It ought surely to be confess'd, that whoever is master of such circumstances, as are proper for his character in life, can have no reason for complaints; and as there can be no reason for complaints in such cases, so there can be no end of them; and the disorder they would produce in private life, would be the same that would follow in publick life, should every single man resolve not to be satisfied till he became a magistrate, and every inferior magistrate resolve not to be satisfied, till he became supreme; and the supreme not to be satisfied with any

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thing,

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thing, but the sovereignty of the world ; for a man to wish his character itself alter'd, and then set his passions and resolutions to work to alter it ; this is no more reasonable than to wish himself another creature, and undertake to new form his nature ; every man's first thought therefore should be, what that character is, and what is a competent provision for it.

The next should be a faithful reflection on what he really has; this, tho' on other occasions apt to be too much insisted on, is however too apt to be over-look'd, when the heart's thus inclin'd, to an irregular lust of increase ; persons so dispos'd can imagine themselves distress'd, with all the proper means of happiness in their hands ; they can torment themselves, blaspheme God, and look with great malignity on their neighbours, meerly because their own useless substance does not multiply faster to no purpose : whereas, would their hearts suffer them to be grateful to God, and just to themselves, all this would be prevented. A sober and regular satisfaction in what they are possess'd of, would prevent all such thoughts, and incline them to bless God with chearful piety, for the favour he has shewn them ; but a spirit of coveting and discontent
only

only makes what they have useless ; the mind is never at leisure, never in rest and good humour enough to enjoy any part of it. New additions are always necessary, and the means of procuring them never scrupulously examined : But when such persons are at last surpriz'd by death, then they reflect with confusion on all the ingratitude and injustice, of which they have been guilty, and the folly of engaging in all this, to no purpose ; they now see how much they had been oblig'd to God's goodness, and how happy they might have been in it ; they see the source of all their complaints, the treachery of the devil and their own hearts ; those complaints that have done so much mischief to themselves and others ; that treachery that engag'd them continually in pursuing shadows, and would never suffer them to be at leisure for real happiness.

Secondly, When some particular views have engag'd the heart, and work'd the passions up to some heat, if they have not proceeded too far out of the call of reason, it may be of use to consider, how seldom things answer an earnest expectation ; especially where the passions have form'd it, and dress'd it up in a set of gay delusions.

'Tis

'Tis very common for men to employ their thoughts on others, to imagine within themselves, how very happy such circumstances must needs make them; this soon raises some clouds over their own condition: discontents gather apace; and if any probable means offer to procure for themselves, what they so much admire in others, the soul is soon fir'd with hopes and resolutions; and all opposition to such great designs must fall before them: all present possessions are either despised, or consider'd only as steps that lead to such heights: no suspicions are allow'd to cool the mind; every thing is depended on as certain; doubts are received as enemies; but probably, all that appears at last is, that they have bought repentance exceeding dear.

Whatever we allow our selves to covet, from the circumstances of others, is always something that we think them particularly happy in; we are therefore desirous to translate it into our own, and with it the happiness we suppose inseparable from it. But there is nothing we are so often mistaken in, as the happiness of other men; and 'tis no wonder; happiness depends so much on the heart, no man can be a competent judge

judge of any, but his own; nor of that neither, at any considerable distance.

So that 'tis far from being certain, that the same things, when they come to be attain'd, will make us happy, tho' it should be suppos'd that they really made them so, from whom we took such desires.

Too few consider, that man is dearer to God than to himself; and that 'tis entirely safe, on that account, to resign to him; that while men pursue their various projects, led on by blind, eager desires, God alone sees thro' the whole train of particulars; He alone knows what fruits the conclusion will produce, and often bears, with patience, the undutiful murmurs of mankind, rais'd against him, for no other reason, but because he restrained 'em from being miserable: Their disappointments have preserv'd what happiness they have remaining, and their repining that they have not been able to destroy it quite, destroys great part of it; an evil to be cur'd only by believing, that things will not always prove just as we conceive 'em, but sometimes change their faces, as they draw nearer to us, and prove, at last, enemies instead of friends.

Thirdly,

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Thirdly. If a man's mind be so far engag'd in favour of what he covets, that he will not hearken to any suspicions, will not be prevail'd with to doubt his entire satisfaction in it, if it could but be obtain'd; he ought, however, to remember God's property, in all parts of the world, and desire it, at least, with decent submission to his will: God's right of disposing all things, according to his own wisdom, should turn our desires into prayers, and leave 'em before the throne of grace, with a dutiful resignation.

Insisting, in a discontented manner, on whatever we take into our hearts, is either disputing with God this right of government and distribution, or else reproaching his conduct in the exercise of it. To suppose the world left to the inclinations and passions of mankind, and that we may fix on what we please, and improve all advantages to obtain it, this is excluding God out of it, and throwing all things into confusion: If God has no property in the world, men can have none; they may contrive Rules of possession to preserve as much peace as may be, but those rules will always give place to privacy and power.

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But if all things are acknowledg'd to be disposed by an invisible hand, all wise and almighty; then an absolute submission to it is plainly reasonable. No privacy can conceal the offender; no power can protect him: Men may, possibly, so far forget themselves and God, as to murmur at some particular dispensations; but when such murmurs are prosecuted to their undeniable consequences, they must appear so blasphemous and unnatural, that they can end in nothing but submission and repentance, or else, the grossest infidelity.

To prevent the growth of such murmurs, it would be proper to consider, that except in very extraordinary cases, all men enjoy more than they can claim, more than they can pretend to demand, more than they can insist they deserve: If God is pleas'd to bestow on others, more than on themselves, their eye should not be evil, because God is good; many reasons there may be for it, of which they are not judges; could the importunity of such spirits be supposed to prevail with God, to adjust one general account with mankind, with relation to this world, and settle the happiness of all, in an exact proportion to their merits, 'twould soon appear that this must make a very melancholick change;

change; but, probably, in none more, than those ungrateful persons who have been loudest in their complaints.

How well soever any man may think of himself, he can't expect to mend his condition in this way; and whoever takes the liberty to reproach the conduct of God, may, probably, be himself call'd to such an account, though the rest of mankind are not; and what is it less than reproaching God's conduct, to insist earnestly, passionately, and resolutely on some thing, which God has not thought fit to give. This is the nature of coveting, as 'tis forbid in this commandment; and a moderate sense of God's right, in the works of his own hands, and of those attributes, with which that right is exercised, would, probably, restrain such extravagant solicitudes, in minds not very violent, or not very much corrupted.

Fourthly, If there are any lawful means to obtain what we desire, we should make a reasonable use of 'em; we should not suffer that desire to gaul and corrupt the heart, and so persuade us to gratify it by unlawful means.

As God has woven into our natures particular appetites and inclinations, it is certainly not unlawful, within proper bounds, to attend to 'em; the danger consists in exceeding those bounds. Therefore, whenever any Man finds his mind much concern'd, for what he is not at present master of, if he has any regard either for his peace or his innocence, he should first consider, whether there may be any lawful means found to obtain it; and if so, then, whether it be worth his while to pursue it by those means. If he is convinc'd there are no lawful ways of obtaining it, he ought immediately to banish all thoughts of it; to insist on it, after this conviction, is directly fighting against God; 'tis insulting and defying both his authority and his providence. And if the lawful means, by which it may possibly be attained, are judged more than equal to it, if he judges it not of moment enough to deserve 'em, 'tis contradicting and fighting against himself, to persist in the pursuit of it.

But where there both appears some lawful method to obtain it, and a competent value in the thing itself, worthy of that method, there the only rational conclusion is, to apply himself to the proper means; not to suffer the desire

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to lye smothering in his mind, till it at length breaks out into vicious measures.

If a man resolves to urge his desires, to press his grievances, to think on nothing but his demands on providence, and at last, when he thinks he can't move heaven, will address himself to the powers of hell, he can expect to be approv'd of by them alone.

He must appear, in the eyes of all serious men, extremely imprudent and unreasonable; a sullen enemy to his own happiness, and a nuisance to mankind.

And in the eyes of God he must appear an undutiful son, alienated from all the influences of reverence and affection, and engag'd in a confederacy with ruffians and rebels, to extort from him what his goodness had offer'd, in a regular way, and what his wisdom would not permit him to offer otherwise. The means which God is pleas'd to put into our hands, to gratify any innocent desire, is to be consider'd as a blessing, and improved accordingly: When such means are neglected, and yet the desire eagerly continued, it ceases to be innocent; 'twill probably soon find some unlawful means of procuring what's propos'd; and in the mean time, has a very bad influence on the mind, such as tends

tends to destroy justice and charity among men ; and all reverence and gratitude towards God ; whereas a proper industry in the state in which providence has plac'd us, will make us useful to the rest of mankind, and sensible of our obligations to God, in the enjoyment of the fruits of it.

Lastly, In order to prevent that load which often lyes so heavy upon the minds of men, destroying their peace, and endangering their innocence, 'tis their interest to guard against all extravagant habits in life ; these are so many unnecessary demands on it, creating proportionable desires in the mind, and continually soliciting satisfaction ; a satisfaction that can never last long, till those extravagancies are themselves restrain'd.

Where such excesses are suffer'd to get possession of the mind, there can be no peace nor safety, no rest, no satisfaction ; 'tis the nature of such vices to encrease their demands ; whatever they are fed with does not turn to any wholesome nourishment, but only swells 'em ; to make it our business to gratify 'em, is only to bring on ourselves continually new difficulties, so many violations of this commandment.

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The only way to settle, must be, to place proper bounds to the mind ; and these bounds are to be judg'd by the state or character that providence appoints us : When we exceed these bounds, we shall be continually expos'd to dangerous temptations, continually sollicitated to find out means to accomplish our desires, how irregular soever those means, or the desires themselves may be.

To conclude.

All men should consider the true end of life in general, that it does not consist in humour and sensuality ; that tho' the infirmities of the body require a great part of our time, the soul is beyond all comparison the more worthy part of our nature ; and therefore as to particular circumstances in life, we should resign to the disposition of God, contented with a decent and regular use of our present portion ; we should lay out the full attention and concern of our hearts on our spiritual prosperity ; that happiness in which our maker has set us no bounds, in which we may be continually improving, and shall never want his assistance to prosper our endeavours.

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For all instances of which assistance, we ought to bless and praise his power, conducted by so much goodness.

And therefore to God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost, be all honour and glory, now and for evermore, *Amen.*

F I N I S.



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